Can You Help Me Get Ahead?

Social Class Differences in Elementary Students' Efforts to Negotiate Opportunities for Learning

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Abstract

Despite the strategic role that children play in the theory of social reproduction, sociologists have not used sufficient empirical evidence to examine whether, when, or how kids actively participate in this process. This study uses data from a qualitative, longitudinal study of children in a socioeconomically diverse, public elementary school to examine social class differences in the extent to which children try to shape their own opportunities for learning and achievement. It does so by looking at one specific type of negotiation: children's requests for help and clarification from teachers. The study finds class differences in children's strategies for seeking assistance in the classroom. Middle- and upper-middle-class children ask for help and clarification more frequently, more confidently, more comfortably, and more strategically than do their working-class peers. Because teachers expect students to ask for help and clarification when they need it, class differences in children's classroom negotiations shape their opportunities for learning and achievement. Overall, then, this study shows that by adopting and displaying particular class-based styles of interaction, children play an active role in social reproduction, doing so, at least in part, through their negotiations with teachers.

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Sociologists generally agree that educational opportunities in America, like opportunities more generally, are highly stratified along social class lines (Jencks & Tach 2006; Sirin 2005; Grusky & DiPrete 1990; Wilson 1959). Most also agree that inequalities arise from cultural differences between social classes in society. In this view, middle-class individuals have more opportunities not because they have *better* cultural orientations, but because society privileges their cultural styles over those of the working-class. Through processes of socialization, these class-based cultures—or "habitus"—reproduce themselves across generations, leading to persistent class-based inequalities (Bourdieu 1973).

Despite agreement about the enduring nature of inequality, sociologists offer competing views on the reproduction of class cultures and privilege over time. Some look to schools as the primary mechanism of reproduction (for reviews, see Fuller & Clarke 1994; Oakes 2005), arguing that schools sort students along social class lines, and provide them with different learning environments and cultural training. Others instead focus on families (for reviews, see Mehan 1992; Sirin 2005), noting that middle-class and working-class parents socialize children differently and provide them with different resources and opportunities for learning.

Implicit in both models is that *children*, will be socialized (at school or at home),to develop particular class cultures. Although this seems simple, it means that children will not only accept the advantages that others create for them, but also influence their own opportunities by enacting their class cultures. For social reproduction to persist, the actions of schools and parents cannot be the only

ones that matter. Rather, children must also adopt class-based patterns of interaction that affect their own outcomes.

Despite children's theoretical importance to social reproduction, sociologists have not fully examined whether, when, or how kids display class cultures. While the sociology of childhood emphasizes children's active influence on patterns of daily life, this research does not sufficiently explore how social class shapes children's interactions or the consequences thereof (Corsaro 2005; Adler & Adler 1994; Thorne 1994). This lack of attention is problematic in that it leaves unanswered the question of whether class-based socialization may provide kids with *different* knowledge, skills, and strategies for shaping their own opportunities, both in school and beyond If kids do adopt class cultures, and if these cultures matter for kids' learning opportunities, then social reproduction hinges not only on the socializing actions of parents and schools, but also on children's own actions.

In this study, I explore whether children are simply the passive recipients of socialization and the advantages it produces, or whether they adopt class cultures and, by displaying them, influence their own opportunities . I do so by looking at one area of kids' lives—elementary school—and by comparing how middle- and working-class kids respond to the situations they encounter there, using data from a longitudinal, ethnographic study of students in one suburban, public elementary school.[1] In this school, I follow a group of students from different social class backgrounds, observing them in third, fourth, and fifth grade. Through observations and teacher interviews, I find that there are real and meaningful class differences in the cultural orientations that children display at school, and that kids enact their class status in numerous ways. In this paper, I focus on one area of classroom interaction where these class differences are particularly apparent: kids' requests for help and clarification from teachers. Through such requests, kids negotiate opportunities for learning, navigating different options for meeting their classroom needs and persuading others to help them achieve their goals.

Children's Place in Prior Research

In identifying mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction, sociologists generally focus on schools, families, or connections between them, but ignore children's contribution to this process. This is problematic in that social reproduction hinges on the assumption that (most) children will eventually adopt parents' class cultures, and shape their own life chances. Thus, existing research is unable to explain whether, when, or how children adopt particular class-based cultures and activate them in ways that influence their opportunities for learning.

Some scholars view schools as the primary mechanism of social reproduction. They recognize that working-class and middle-class children rarely attend the same schools (Farley 1977; Kahlenberg 2001; Rumberger & Palardy 2008; Ball 1993; Carnoy 2000; Holme 2002),[2] and that even when they do, processes like tracking and ability grouping promote further class-based separation (Heyns 1974; Lee & Bryk 1988; Gamoran 1992; Pallas et al. 1994; Oakes 2005). After sorting students along class lines, schools then offer different knowledge and cultural training (Anyon 2007; Apple 1979; Erickson & Mohatt 1982; Wilcox 1982; Cookson & Hodges Persell 1987; Bowles & Gintis 2001; Nelson & Schutz 2007), as well as different opportunities for learning and achievement (Hedges & Rowley 1994; Alexander et al. 1979; Kelly 2007).

Other scholars see families as the force of social reproduction, recognizing that parents' social class—education, employment, and income—matters more than school processes for student outcomes (Coleman et al. 1966; Hanushek 1997; Entwisle & Alexander 1992; Downey, von Hippel, & Broh 2004; Condron 2009). They argue that parents from different social classes socialize children differently (Bronfenbrenner 1958; Kohn 1959; Bernstein 1971; Heath 1983; Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn 2002), and provide children with different environments and opportunities for learning (Teachman 1987; Duncan & Brook-Gunn 1997; Lichter 1997; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson 1997; McLanahan 2004; Buchmann & DiPrete 2006; Maier, Ford, & Schneider 2007). In this view, social class

matters not just for the material resources it provides, but because of its relationship to cultures of interaction.

These studies, however, sometimes imply that middle-class culture is "better" than working-class culture. To avoid such assumptions, Bourdieu (1973, 1984) stresses the arbitrariness of culture, arguing that while different classes do have different styles of interaction, no style is inherently better. Rather, because the middle-class controls dominant institutions like schools, these institutions tend to privilege middle-class cultural styles (see also DiMaggio 1982; Lareau 2000, 2003). Furthermore, because the middle-class has an interest in maintaining its relative advantage, these institutions have little incentive to teach middle-class cultural norms.

In developing this view, Bourdieu and others recognize that children play a critical role in social reproduction, receiving advantages that others (namely parents) create for them and socialization to shape their own opportunities. Lareau (2000) suggests, for example, that middle-class children "learn to *expect*" the advantages that parents acquire for them and "begin to develop a vocabulary and orientation toward institutions that will be useful in the future, when they come to to extract advantages on their own behalf" (166). Despite this acknowledgement, however, these scholars never actually examine how children develop cultural orientations. They also neglect to consider how w influence their own advantages, and whether they do so in the classroom, away from their parents' supportive, watchful gaze.

Thus, while these studies bolster our understanding of social reproduction, they are also incomplete. Parents and schools clearly matter, but are only part of the equation: we also have to examine kids' contribution to this process. If kids will eventually internalize and exhibit class cultures this means that they will not only accept advantages that others create for them, but also actively shape their own opportunities. Existing research, however, tells us little about whether this is actually the case.

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When scholars do consider young children as active cultural agents (Corsaro 2005, Adler & Adler 1994; Thorne 1994), they rarely explore children's role in reproducing inequalities. While some recognize that kids *can* contribute to social reproduction (Jenks 1996; Mayall 1999; Corsaro 2005; Matthews 2007), they do not examine kids' class-based cultures.[3] Alternatively, while others (Willis 1981;MacLeod 1995; Bettie 2002) do study the adoption of class cultures, they focus on adolescents, leaving open questions of *when* children acquire these orientations.[4] Thus, we do not know whether class cultures shape how children negotiate opportunities. And yet, if kids are to complete the cycle of reproduction, they cannot simply accept the advantages that others create for them; they also have to shape their own opportunities.

Pointing to Possibilities

While scholars have not specifically examined kids' role in social reproduction, some evidence suggests that they participate in this process. While Lareau (2002, 2003) focuses on parents' class cultures, her research also shows parents urging kids to act in class-specific ways. provides glimmers of evidence that kids' orientations also vary along class lines. She finds that with parents' encouragement, middle-class children display an "emerging sense of entitlement," asserting themselves in interactions with professionals like doctors and coaches. Poor and working-class children instead display an "emerging sense of constraint" that reflects their parents' discomfort with and deference to professional authorities.[5]   And yet, while Lareau shows that middle-class and working-class children develop different styles of interacting with institutions, her studies are also limited. They tell us little about whether such differences persist away from parents' watchful gaze or in one particularly important setting—the classroom. Thus, we still do not know whether class differences in children's behavior are also apparent at school and, if so, how they shape kids' learning opportunities.

Even studies that observe class differences in kids' school behavior cannot pinpoint the source of variation. Nelson and Schutz (2007) compare children's interactions in two preschools serving different student populations: one middle-class, one working-class. They find that children in middle-class preschools receive more unsolicited attention, make more requests, particularly for attention, and also engage in more frequent verbal negotiations with teachers. And yet, because Nelson and Schutz's study (like similar studies) observes working-class kids in working-class schools and middle-class kids in middle-class schools, it cannot say whether differences in kids' interactional styles reflect class differences in school culture and teaching styles (as they conclude), or class differences in the cultural orientations that kids bring to school.[6] Thus, to understand class differences in how children negotiate learning opportunities, we need to compare middle- and working-class kids in the same school settings.

Strategic Negotiations: The Importance of Help-Seeking

While kids can negotiate opportunities in various ways, I focus primarily on kids' requests for assistance and clarification from their teachers. Research shows that teachers expect students to ask for help (Patrick et al. 2001), and that help-seeking correlates positively with school achievement (Ryan, Hicks, & Midgley 1997; Gall 1985; Newman 2000). Such research, however, is limited. While scholars have explored variation in help-seeking, they have not examined social-class differences in help-seeking or their role in reproducing inequalities. Existing research also takes a narrow view of help-seeking, relying on surveys that have students report how often they ask for help when are struggling (Gall 1985; Ryan et al. 1997). They do not observe students, or explore how different styles of help-seeking matter for outcomes.

By observing students, I can identify a broad range of help-seeking behaviors—direct and indirect requests for assistance, clarification, and "checking" of work—and their influence on students' learning

opportunities. This wide view of help-seeking recognizes that students might perceive the need for help differently, and that some might negotiate for extra help and clarification that they do not necessarily "need," but from which they can still benefit. It also recognizes clarification and "checking" as important types of assistance: because teachers control assignments (Mehan 1979), students can use these requests to improve their work even before receiving a grade. Thus, by exploring class differences in the nature and consequences of children's help-seeking, I can more fully understand the transmission of inequality and kids' role in this process.

Research Goals

This project examines the possibility that children—like parents and schools—actively contribute to social reproduction by displaying class-based styles of interaction with meaningful consequences for opportunities. To do so, I explore whether middle-class and working-class kids vary in their attempts to tailor their classroom experiences to meet their learning needs.

While kids can negotiate opportunities in numerous ways—asking for permission, help, or clarification, looking for attention, altering expectations and consequences, etc.—I focus here on kids' requests for help and clarification from the teacher, doing so because help-seeking has particularly strong consequences for kids' educational opportunities.[7]

I use the term "negotiate" to describe how kids choose among various pathways to achieving an individual goal. A student who wants or needs help can do nothing or seek assistance. If that student decides to ask a teacher for help (and not a peer), he can then raise his hand, call out, or get up to make his request. These decisions influence kids' learning opportunities, determining whether students receive assistance, and how long they wait to get it.

Research Site

   Most studies of social class and schooling compare working-class kids in working-class schools to middle-class kids in middle-class schools. While this reflects reality—most schools are socioeconomically homogeneous (Kahlenberg 2001)—it prevents scholars from distinguishing the influence of school-level class composition from that of individual class backgrounds. Thus, I selected Maplewood Elementary School (all names are pseudonyms) as a research site because it serves students from middle-class and working-class backgrounds. I drew on prior knowledge of Maplewood and its student body, and used family ties to the district to gain access to the school.[8] My familiarity with the setting and my status as a young, white woman (similar to many Maplewood teachers) and the daughter of a schoolteacher increased my comfort interacting with students, teachers, and families and, seemingly, their trust of and openness with me.

   Maplewood is a suburban, public, elementary school that serves K-5 students (See Appendix A) who live in Fair Hills, a small town outside of a large, Eastern city. Fair Hills has a small-town center surrounded by older subdivisions and newer developments. Because Maplewood is a local public school—not a Charter or Magnet school—the student diversity reflects the diversity of the surrounding community. The students live in mobile home neighborhoods, apartment buildings, condominiums and townhomes, as well as single family homes ranging in value from about $200K to more than $1million.

   Maplewood's social class composition makes it an apt location for this study. While the majority of Maplewood's students are middle- or upper-middle-class, a substantial minority of the students are from working-class backgrounds. Because the students at Maplewood spend the majority of their school day in mixed-ability classes,[9] the school offers ample opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to interact in the same classrooms.[10] Thus, by observing at Maplewood, I can compare how students from different class backgrounds respond to the same teachers, peers, environments, and activities, as well as how teachers respond to students from different class backgrounds.

Research Sample

This project focuses on the cohort of students who completed fifth grade at Maplewood in June 2010. I began observing this group in the late spring of their third grade year. I chose this group both because I wanted to follow them over time within one school, and because most research on youth and social reproduction focuses on adolescents, not kids(MacLeod 1995, Bettie 2002, Willis 1981). I wanted to examine whether kids at this age adopt class cultures and how these class-based styles affect kids' educational opportunities.

Initially, the project included 74 students in four third-grade classes at Maplewood.[11] While some of the original participants moved away during the study (N=12), other new students also joined the project (N=4). Thus, the final sample has 66 students in fifth-grade at Maplewood in 2009-2010: . fifty-six white students, six Asian-American students, and four Latino students. To avoid conflating issues of race and class, this paper focuses only on the fifty-six white students. Of these, forty-four are middle-class[12] and twelve are working-class (see Appendix B for descriptions of the sample and explanations of class distinctions).While it would be ideal to have a balanced sample of working-class and middle-class students, such samples are easier to locate when comparing working-class and middle-class students in two different schools. Thus, to examine the actions/interactions of kids from different class backgrounds in the same local-school setting, I had to work with the natural diversity of the school environment.

The project also includes data on the third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers at Maplewood, as well those who teach "Specials" like Art and Gym. While the teachers do vary in their demeanors and instructional styles (see Appendix C), these variations and their relationship to children's negotiations are beyond the scope of this paper (see Blumenfeld et al. 1978; Brophy 1983; Good 1987 for relevant reviews). My research design also allows me to look beyond differences across teachers. By observing middle-class and working-class kids with the same teacher, by observing the same students with

different teachers over time, I can identify patterns of student behavior that do not directly reflect teaching styles.

Research Methods

I collected the data for this project using various research methods, including participant observations, interviews, and surveys. I began the project with pilot observations in March 2008, when the students were in third grade. From September 2008 to June 2010, I then spent approximately six to eight hours a week observing at Maplewood, dividing my time equally between the four classes in each grade. I also rotated the days and times that I observed each class to see students in a variety of contexts, settings, and activities. I observed during regular (mixed-ability) classes, ability-grouped math classes, and "specials," at lunch, on the playground, and during other school activities (assemblies, field-days, etc.). During my observations, I kept jottings, which I expanded into detailed field notes upon completing each session.

My role in the field was primarily one of observer. During my observations, I sometimes assisted teachers by passing out materials or doing other organizational tasks, but I primarily listened and watched, sitting in empty seats or walking around the classroom. I made it clear to the students and teachers that I would not reprimand or "tell on" kids for bad behavior unless they were threatening another student's life, and I never had to do so. Many of the students seemed to enjoy having me around—they liked to tell me stories, proudly show me their work, or even invite me to sit with them at lunch—while others would just say hello or ignore me entirely.

In addition to my observations, I conducted formal interviews with the third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teachers. I asked about their students' home lives, academic strengths/weaknesses, and progress over time, as well as about their teaching and expectations for students. I also supplemented

these formal interviews with informal discussions that I used to clarify my observations and to obtain information about specific students.

To supplement this ethnographic information, I also collected data on students' family background characteristics and school achievement. In Fall 2008 and Spring 2010, I conducted parent surveys with demographic questions and questions about kids' home lives, friendships, and out-of-school time. In June 2010, I also collected grades, teacher comments, and standardized test scores from the students' school records.

The Poorly Lit Path: Ambiguous Expectations and the Culture of Success

Regardless of social class and academic ability, all of the students at Maplewood seem to espouse (at least to some degree) the school's culture of success. Teachers and students value achievements big and small. Kids encourage each other and celebrate their own accomplishments. Teachers and administrators enforce this "culture of success" with inspirational posters and by offering consistent praise and encouragement. All of these messages reinforce kids' belief in the importance of learning and achievement. Success in school, however, requires more than just desire. Kids must also comply with teachers' expectations,[13] which are not always clearly stated or easy to follow (Patrick et al. 2001). Ambiguous expectations, in turn, require that kids decode teachers' requests and decide how best to respond. The tools for decoding and deciding, however, are stratified along class lines. Thus, just as middle-class parents have more of the resources they need to meet teachers' demands for parental involvement (Lareau 2002), middle-class kids may also have an advantage in meeting teachers' classroom expectations.

One such expectation is that students should ask for help or clarification when they need it (Patrick et al. 2001). At Maplewood, this belief is sometimes explicit, but often left unsaid. After going over directions, teachers generally ask: "Any questions?" In doing so, however, teachers generally wait only

two or three seconds for kids to raise their hands before they say "Okay, good" or "Go ahead and get started." This brief timeframe requires kids to anticipate that the teacher will ask for questions and be ready to respond. And yet, students often become aware of questions and problems only after they start an activity. While working, kids sometimes encounter vague directions or ambiguous questions, or begin to struggle with the assignment. In these circumstances, students have to choose for themselves whether to seek help and how to proceed.

While Maplewood teachers are almost always willing to answer questions or provide assistance, they do not always explicitly encourage kids to come to them with questions or problems that they find along the way. Even when teachers do offer reminders like: "Let me know if you get stuck," such statements remain ambiguous. They do not give students clear direction about when or how to ask for help, and thus leave it up to students to decode these requests. Should students ask for help the moment they "get stuck," or should they try to work through it first? Should they raise their hands, call out, or go up to the teacher's desk? Research shows, however, that not all students come to school with the "social skills" necessary for learning, skills that teachers assume all students already possess (LeCompte 1978; Bellanca & Forarty 2003). These skills are part of a "hidden curriculum" that is neither taught nor explicitly stated, but still matters for students' success in school and beyond (LeCompte 1978; DeRoche & Williams 2001; see Wentzel 1991 for a review). Because middle-class kids bring from home a greater understanding of this "hidden curriculum," they may also be more successful both in meeting teachers' expectations for help-seeking and in using their requests to negotiate opportunities for learning.

<u>Overview of Findings</u>

Overall, I find that even within the same classroom settings, there are substantial social class differences in the extent to which kids try to negotiate learning opportunities. Regardless of academic

ability/achievement, middle-class kids ask for help and clarification from teachers more often than do their working-class peers, and also do so more comfortably, confidently, and strategically. Thus, while almost all of Maplewood's students *want* to succeed in school, some students have more of the knowledge and cultural skills that they need to do so. Rather, the opportunities that kids encounter at school are stratified, at least in part, along social class lines. Such stratification, however, reflects not only—as prior research has suggested—the influence of parents, teachers, or the school as a whole. Rather, this stratification is also the product of kids' own actions in the classroom.

Confidence, Comfort, and the Willingness to Negotiate Opportunities

Kids display their adoption of class cultures, in part, through their willingness to ask for help and clarification when they need it. While middle-class and upper-middle-class kids rarely hesitate to make requests from the teacher, working-class kids are often much more tentative about acknowledging their classroom needs. As a result, middle-class kids ask for help and clarification from teachers more frequently than do their working-class peers.

Even when working-class kids would benefit from the teacher's assistance, they are often reluctant to voice their needs and to ask directly for help. During Language Arts one afternoon, Ms. Dunham sits perched on a stool, reading aloud from a novel. The kids are at their desks. During read-aloud, they can work on homework or projects, draw, play math games on the computers, or just sit quietly and listen to the story. As Ms. Dunham reads aloud, Jesse, a working-class boy, stands at his seat, hunched forward, a look of concentration on his face. He is trying to fold a large piece of blue construction paper into an open-topped box, following the pattern Ms. Dunham showed them in math this morning. The box, however, is not fastened in any way, and when Jesse lets go, the sides sag outward. Jesse is frustrated, and frowns at the box as he tries to figure out what to do. After a moment, Jesse looks up and notices a stapler on a friend's desk nearby. Jesse reaches over and gets the stapler. He

tries repeatedly to staple the corner of the box, but eventually gives up and pries open the stapler,

finding it empty.

> Jesse lets the stapler snap shut again with a loud, metallic "Smack!"
>
> Jesse puts the stapler down and sighs quietly. He frowns frustratedly at the
> sagging paper box. After a long moment, Jesse attacks the box again, repeatedly
> creasing each edge, trying desperately to get it to hold its shape.

Jesse is clearly struggling: he needs help with both the box and the stapler. Like working-class kids

more generally, however, Jesse does not ask for help. Instead, he just continues to toil on his own.

Such reluctance, however, does not mean that working-class kids are just shyer than their middle-class

peers. Jesse is a jokester and a storyteller—he loves to perform for his teachers and his peers, and his

teachers frequently have to remind him not to talk during class. This suggests, in turn, that working-

class kids' reluctance to negotiate with teachers for help and clarification is not simply a reflection of

their personalities, but rather reflects a difference in their class cultural orientations.

While working-class kids are often hesitant to acknowledge their needs for help in the classroom,

they do appreciate the assistance that they receive. As Jesse was struggling, Ms. Dunham repeatedly

glanced up at him. When she heard the stapler bang shut, Ms. Dunham stopped reading. She asked

Asha to continue reading for her, and then went to her desk to get staples for Jesse, taking them over

to him.

> Moving in beside Jesse, Ms. Dunham holds out the bar of staples, smiling warmly.
>
> Jesse looks up at Ms. Dunham gratefully, but doesn't say anything. He just picks
> up the stapler and pries it open again so that Ms. Dunham can insert the staples.
>
> After Ms. Dunham helps Jesse with the stapler, she instinctively reaches over and
> takes the sides of his box, saying softly: "Here, lemme get this for you." Jesse

nods, smiling sheepishly as he reaches in with the stapler to fasten the first

corner.

As this example suggests, then, while working-class kids like Jesse are often reluctant to ask for

assistance, they sincerely appreciate the help that they receive.

Middle-class kids, on the other hand, rarely hesitate to make requests. As Ms. Dunham heads back

toward Jesse, the box of staples in hand, Mandy, a middle-class girl, jumps up from her seat and trots

after Ms. Dunham, barraging her with questions about a poster she is making for her monthly book

report.

Coming up behind Ms. Dunham, Mandy thrusts out her poster, asking hopefully:

"Is this okay so far?"

Still holding Jesse's box, Ms. Dunham glances over her shoulder at Mandy's

poster. She scans it quickly and nods, whispering encouragingly: "Looks good!"

Ms. Dunham gives Mandy a reassuring smile, but Mandy does not give up. She just pushes with more

questions, firing them one after another. While Jesse waits quietly, Ms. Dunham patiently answers

each of Mandy's queries. Unlike Jesse, then, Mandy does not hesitate to ask for the help and

clarification that she needs. Like most middle-class kids, she readily asserts herself in interactions with

the teacher, using these interactions to negotiate opportunities for assistance with and clarification

about classroom tasks and assignments.

These class disparities in children's willingness to negotiate are particularly pronounced with

respect to kids' requests for clarification from teachers. During a test in Mr. Potter's advanced math

class, the kids encountered a particularly difficult question: "Identification numbers for club members

are one letter followed by three digits. How many possible ID numbers are there?" All but two of the

fourteen middle-class kids read the question and then immediately jump up or raise their hands to ask

Mr. Potter to explain the question. Mr. Potter circles around, patiently giving the same hint to each

student who asks for help. The two working-class children in the class—Jared and Amelia—do not ask for help or clarification. Instead, they both sit hunched over their tests, staring quizzically at the problem for a long time before trying to answer it on their own. Despite their diligence and effort, however, neither Jared nor Amelia does the problem correctly. Thus, because of their reluctance to ask for help and clarification, working-class kids often miss the information they need to decode ambiguous expectations they encounter in school.

These class differences in kids' requests for clarification go beyond just test questions. For middle-class kids, the desire to succeed drives them to ensure that they completely understand the directions and expectations for activities and assignments. Thus, when presented with new projects, these kids often bombard teachers with clarifying questions, as this example suggests. During Social Studies one morning, Mr. Fischer gives his class a few minutes of "kid time," telling them to eat their snacks and get out their paper airplanes while he sets up a video about the Wright Brothers. The planes are for a class competition, and they must be made only of folded paper, no tape, no clips, or other add-ons. Each kid will get one chance to throw their plane down the hallway, and the one that travels farthest will win a prize. As Mr. Fischer sets up the video, many of the middle-class kids in the class start to barrage him with questions about the planes and the competition. Ethan, a middle-class boy, calls out loudly from his desk: "Mr. Fischer!".

> As Mr. Fischer glances up from his laptop , Ethan asks eagerly: "Do you get extra
> credit if [your plane] goes backward after it goes forward?" Mr. Fischer chuckles
> lightly. He retorts playfully, shaking his head: "No, but I'm interested to see yours
> now!" Ethan grins broadly, looking decidedly pleased to hear that Mr. Fischer is
> interested in seeing his plane.

Hearing Ethan's question, other middle-class kids in the class also begin to call out their own questions like: *"If you throw your plane and it hits the wall, do you get to go again?"* (Zara, Asian-American,

middle-class girl), and *"Are we allowed to use the [style of folding planes] you showed us?"* (Ted,

middle-class boy). As Mr. Fischer good-naturedly answers the kids' questions, they continue to fire

away with more. This barrage of questions, it seems, is an effort by middle-class kids to ensure that

they fully understand the activity. More generally, middle-class kids use clarifying questions to

determine whether they have the information they need to meet or exceed the teacher's expectations

for each assignment and activity. Working-class kids, on the other hand, rarely request detailed

explanations of classroom tasks, and thus do not have the same advantages in meeting teachers'

unstated expectations.

As these various examples suggest, there are clear class differences in kids' willingness to ask

teachers for help and clarification. This does not mean, however, that working-class kids never ask for

help, or that all middle-class kids always do so. And yet, when working-class kids do engage in these

types of interactions, they do less comfortably and less assertively than do their middle-class peers, as

this example shows. At the beginning of the afternoon work period, Mr. Fischer stands at the front of

the room and explains this week's Social Studies project. He wants the kids to use their Social Studies

books to find important people and events of the "Progressive Era," and then make "trading cards" for

five of them. Meanwhile, Zach, a working-class boy, is in the bathroom. As Zach strolls back into the

room, Mr. Fischer is finishing going over the assignment. After reminding the kids that each trading

card should have a picture and a caption on the front, and a list of relevant facts on the back, Mr.

Fischer sets the kids to work and goes to the file cabinet to sort papers. Zach, meanwhile, realizes that

he has missed most of the teacher's instructions, sliding into his chair with a puzzled frown on his face.

Zach glances over at his friends, Carlos and Tyler, both working-class boys who sit nearby. After a long

pause, Zach leans over to whisper to Carlos and Tyler: "How long do the captions have to be?" Carlos

and Tyler, however, are also unsure of the directions, eventually telling Zach that if he really wants to

know, he should "go ask Mr. F." Zach is not pleased with this option, but seems to realize that it is his

only option if he wants to complete the assignment correctly.

> Zach sighs heavily and loudly, almost groaning, and pushes his chair back hard
>
> away from his desk. He sits there for a long moment, glaring at his desk.
>
> Eventually, Zach gets up slowly. As he does so, Zach begins to flap his arms, as if
>
> trying to shake away his frustration and anxiety about having to ask for help. He
>
> stands at his desk for another moment, glaring down at the floor, flapping his
>
> arms hard, his whole body jiggling with the effort.

With the other kids bent over their desks, reading through their books for information, Zach finally gets

up the courage to actually ask for help.

> After flapping for about five seconds, Zach starts to turn slowly around. As he
>
> turns, still scowling and shaking his fists lightly by his sides, Zach glances up,
>
> looking around for Mr. Fischer.

Zach finally spots Mr. Fischer standing at the opposite side of the room, talking with a group of girls at

one of the other desk groups. Zach heads toward Mr. Fischer, but does not approach him directly to

ask for help.

> Once he spots Mr. Fischer, Zach begins to trudge heavily and slowly toward him.
>
> Instead of going straight up to Mr. Fischer, however, Zach hangs back, a few feet
>
> away. He waits there, still shaking his fists lightly, looking uncomfortable, his face
>
> still set in an anxious frown.

When Mr. Fischer finally turns to go back to his desk, he spots Zach, who is still standing behind him,

waiting, staring hard at the floor.

> Mr. Fischer looks down at Zach and smiles pleasantly, asking casually: "What's
>
> up?" At this, Zach glances up quickly, startled, and then back down at the floor

again. He starts to swing his arms like helicopter blades, twisting his body from

side to side. Zach continues this motion as he starts to mumble, asking haltingly,

in a low, barely audible voice, not looking Mr. Fischer in the eye: "So… uh… like,

how long do the, uh… the captions have to be?"

Mr. Fischer stands casually, hands in his pockets and listens sympathetically before explaining his

expectations for how long the captions should be and what they should include. As Mr. Fischer goes

through these expectations, Zach glances back and forth anxiously between him and the floor.

Gradually, however, Zach starts to relax, such that by the time Mr. Fischer finishes going over examples

of pictures and captions, Zach is smiling timidly and nodding almost confidently. As this example

suggests, when working-class kids do ask for help, they tend to do so hesitantly and without the same

sense of entitlement that their middle-class peers tend to display. And yet, while working-class kids like

Zach are often reluctant to ask for help and clarification, they are still deeply grateful for the assistance

and attention that they receive.

   Taken together, these examples suggest that middle-class kids are very confident and comfortable

negotiating with teachers, and that, as a result, they do so more willingly than do their working-class

peers. When working-class kids do ask for help and clarification, they tend to do so tentatively and

without the sense of entitlement that middle-class kids frequently display in these interactions. While

some middle-class kids are shy and quiet, and some working-class kids are more outgoing, the general

pattern still holds. . This means, in turn, that kids display their class cultural membership through their

willingness to ask for help and clarification from teachers and also through the confidence and comfort

that they display in these interactions.

Strategic Negotiations: Choosing and Timing Requests

   The kids at Maplewood also display their emerging class cultures through the approaches they take

when they are struggling. Working-class kids tend to wait for assistance rather than proactively seeking

help, as this example suggests. The kids in Ms. Dunham's grade-level math class are working in pairs

on projects in which they have to apply what they have learned about multiplying fractions,

completing sets of calculations and displaying them on posters. As the kids work, Ms. Dunham circles

around, stopping to check in with each group. Jesse and Sadie, two working-class kids, are sitting

together at the front of the room arguing quietly. Neither of them understands the assignment, but

they do not ask for help. When Ms. Dunham finishes working with another group nearby, she

continues around to Jesse and Sadie.

> Ms. Dunham stops next to Sadie and Jesse, asking pleasantly: "How're you guys
>
> doing?" Jesse and Sadie just shrug, shifting uncomfortably and not looking Ms.
>
> Dunham in the eye. Noting their blank papers, Ms. Dunham sits down cross-
>
> legged between them. She picks up a pencil and starts working through the first
>
> calculation as Jesse and Sadie watch intently.

Jesse and Sadie need help with the assignment, but do not ask for it directly. Like other working-class

kids, they are reluctant to voice their needs, instead waiting for the teacher to offer assistance.

   Middle-class kids, on the other hand, use a variety of help-seeking methods. Rather than waiting

passively for assistance, they instead tend to proactively call out or get up to ask for what they need,

As Ms. Dunham worked with Jesse and Sadie, Danny, a middle-class boy, got up quickly from where he

was working with his partner at the back of the room. Now, Danny makes a beeline for Ms. Dunham.

> Grabbing the scratch paper with his calculations, Danny marches proudly up to
>
> Ms. Dunham. Danny positions himself right next to Ms. Dunham and makes a
>
> little "ahem" noise as if trying to get her attention.

While Ms. Dunham can clearly see Danny standing beside her, she does not immediately acknowledge his presence. Instead, she continues to explain the assignment to Jesse and Sadie. Danny, meanwhile, begins to get impatient, rocking his foot from one foot to the other and occasionally letting out little sighs. Finally, when Ms. Dunham finishes her explanation, she turns her attention to Danny.

> Giving Jesse and Sadie a "go ahead" nod, Ms. Dunham twists around to look up at Danny. She gives him a broad, pleasant smile and lifts her eyebrows as if to silently ask "What's up?"

With Ms. Dunham now paying attention, Danny does not hesitate to make his request.

> At this, Danny thrusts out his scratch paper, stating confidently that he thinks he is finished. Pausing momentarily, Danny adds, more anxiously,: "Can you check it and see if I did it right?" Ms. Dunham nods and takes the paper from Danny, reading it silently and nodding.

Rather than waiting at his seat for Ms. Dunham to circle around to check on him, Danny instead opted to make a direct beeline for the teacher. This allowed Danny to move immediately to the next portion of his project without wasting time waiting. Thus, by carefully choosing their methods of help-seeking, middle-class kids can get the help and clarification they want or need in a timely and efficient manner. Working-class kids, on the other hand, tend to wait for help, either by raising their hand and waiting for the teacher to notice or by waiting for the teacher to approach them to offer unsolicited assistance.

When working-class kids do ask for help, they tend to choose more "traditional" strategies. Rather than calling out or getting up to make requests, these kids instead stay at their seats with their hands raised, waiting for the teacher to notice them, as this scene shows. The kids in Mr. Potter's class are all at their desks, working quietly on a Social Studies test. Mr. Potter, meanwhile, is standing at the front of his desk, peeling an orange as he looks out the windows. As Mr. Potter peels his orange, Shannon, a working-class girl, looks up from her test and raises her hand to ask for help.

> Slowly and hesitantly, Shannon lifts her hand halfway, her elbow bent timidly.
>
> Shannon quickly glances over at Mr. Potter, but Mr. Potter doesn't seem to be
>
> able to see Shannon from the way that he is standing. He just keeps peeling his
>
> orange.

Because Mr. Potter cannot see Shannon, he does not acknowledge her raised hand or go over to

answer her question about the test. A moment, later, however, as Shannon continues to wait with her

hand raised timidly, Mr. Potter responds almost immediately when Owen, a middle-class boy, jumps

up and goes directly to Mr. Potter to ask for help.

> Owen slides out of his chair at the back of the room, an anxious but determined
>
> frown on his face. Owen grabs his test and scurries up to where Mr. Potter is still
>
> standing at his desk.

Mr. Potter sees Owen out of the corner of his eye and turns to watch him approach, smiling warmly.

Shannon, meanwhile, just sits with her hand raised timidly, not working on the test. Mr. Potter,

however, still does not see Shannon's hand. Instead, he turns his attention to Owen.

> Stepping up next to Mr. Potter, Owen anxiously asks him to explain the directions
>
> for the essay question on the test. Mr. Potter smiles reassuringly and leans down
>
> to explain in a low but pleasant whisper. Owen listens intently, nodding
>
> appreciatively.

When Mr. Potter finishes his explanation, Owen thanks him and scampers back to his seat. Shannon,

meanwhile, is still sitting with her hand raised halfway. As Mr. Potter was working with Owen, Shannon

occasionally glanced up hopefully at Mr. Potter, but did not get up to ask for help or continue to work

on her test. Finally, however, after about four minutes of waiting, Mr. Potter notices Shannon's raised

hand.

> As Mr. Potter turns to drop his orange peel into the trash, he sees Shannon's
>
> half-raised hand. Mr. Potter's face immediately contorts into a remorseful frown,
>
> and he lets out a soft "Oh!" Shaking his head, Mr. Potter rushes toward Shannon.
>
> As he approaches, he apologizes repeatedly in a hushed tone. Mr. Potter
>
> immediately kneels down in front of Shannon's desk, the flesh of his orange still
>
> cupped in his hand as he listens intently to her question, nodding reassuringly
>
> before starting to explain the answer.

As this quote suggests, then, working-class kids like Shannon often wait for help and clarification with

their hands raised while their middle-class peers—kids like Owen—rush forward to approach the

teacher direction with their questions and requests. While Mr. Potter's apologetic reaction makes it

clear that he did not intend to privilege Owen's request over Shannon's, the proactive nature of

Owen's request made it hard to miss.

These different styles of help-seeking, then, seem to have real consequences for the amount of

time that kids have to wait for help or assistance. Thus, even when working-class kids do acknowledge

their need for help, they often spend more time waiting for help and less time working than do the

middle-class kids who are more proactive in their requests. The methods that kids choose for seeking

help, however, can affect not only the amount of time kids spend waiting for help, but also the amount

of help that they get. While Shannon continued to wait patiently for Mr. Potter to notice her hand, not

all kids are willing to wait so long for the teacher's attention. And yet, while working-class kids who

have to wait a long time will generally put their hands down before the teachers notice them, middle-

class kids instead tend to switch strategies, moving from hand raising to calling out or going directly to

the teacher to ask for help. This suggests, in turn, that , kids' methods and styles of help-seking

influence not only the time they spend waiting for help, but also whether they actually receive the help

that they need.

Kids also display their emerging class cultures through the strategies they use in executing these negotiations. As this excerpt suggests, middle-class kids carefully time and perform their requests for help and clarification in very strategic ways. During Language Arts, Mr. Potter projects a writing prompt onto the Smart Board. It reads: "Goats, sheep, and chickens belong on a farm, not in the middle of…." Mr. Potter gives the kids two minutes to copy the prompt into their journals, finish the sentence, and add one more. As the kids work, Mr. Potter circles around, checking their progress. Once two minutes have passed, Mr. Potter has the kids stop writing and pass their journals three times to the left. At this point, Mr. Potter is standing in the middle of the room (see Figure 1). He glances up at the clock and then gives the kids one minute to read their new story and add another sentence. As the kids start to work, Mr. Potter instinctively looks over toward Pedro, a working-class, Latino boy who still struggles with English.

> Mr. Potter glances quickly over at Pedro, who is staring blankly at the journal on
> his desk. Mr. Potter watches Pedro for a moment, and then starts to move
> toward him.

Meanwhile, Julie, a middle-class girl, has been glaring frustratedly at the journal in front of her. Now, as Mr. Potter starts to move, Julie stops him, calling out strategically to get his attention before he can get to Pedro.

> As Mr. Potter starts to move toward Pedro, Julie glances up at Mr. Potter,
> watching him intently. Just as Mr. Potter passes in front of her, Julie sits up tall in
> her seat. She calls out suddenly in a loud, insistent whisper: "Mr. Potter!"

Mr. Potter hears Julie and immediately turns to help, leaving Pedro to struggle silently on his own.

> Mr. Potter hears his name and looks over at Julie, lifting his eyebrows
> questioningly.

> Julie contorts her face into a pained expression. She slumps forward over her desk and whines loudly: "I can't read this."
>
> Hearing Julie's complaint, Mr. Potter nods and quickly changes course. Instead of heading toward Pedro, he makes his way directly over to Julie, helping her decipher the handwriting in the journal.

Because Julie called out to ask for help, and particularly because she did so before Mr. Potter reached Pedro, Mr. Potter had almost no choice but to help Julie first. Pedro did not make a request for help, and thus had no social claim to Mr. Potter's attention. Mr. Potter, in turn, could not simply tell Julie to wait her "turn," because there was technically no one ahead of her in "line" for help. This suggests, then, that by strategically timing and performing their requests, middle-class kids like Julie can help to ensure that the teacher is both aware of their needs and obligated to fulfill them. They do so even if it means diverting the teachers' attention away from other kids—like Pedro—who might also need help and clarification, but who are less proactive and strategic in seeking them.

Taken together, these examples show clear class differences in kids' help-seeking strategies. While middle-class kids sometimes raise their hands, and working-class kids sometimes get up to ask for help, the general pattern shows that middle-class kids approach these negotiations very proactively, carefully choosing their methods of help-seeking and timing them to ensure that the teacher is aware of their needs. These choices, in turn, have consequences for kids' learning opportunities. Because of the approaches that they take in the classroom, middle-class kids generally spend less time waiting for attention from the teacher and are more likely to get the help and clarification that they need. That said, middle-class kids have an advantage in help-seeking not because their cultural style is inherently better than that of their working-class peers, but because teachers respond positively to the help-seeking strategies they use.

And yet, despite the advantages middle-class kids have in meeting teachers' expectations for help-seeking, their cultural styles may also be less advantageous for meeting other teacher demands. Teachers, for example, expect kids to seek help, but also want them to be "good problem solvers." As the teachers frequently noted, kids who depend too much on teachers "are not good problem-solvers." Rather than taking the time to read directions and to check their work, middle-class kids often rely on the teachers to explain instructions and check their work. Furthermore, when middle-class kids cross into over-dependence (particularly through their requests for "checking" and clarification), they risk provoking teachers' frustrations. Despite this risk, however, middle-class kids' willingness to ask teachers to explain directions or check work does seem to help them to avoid missed errors and to proceed more quickly and efficiently down the poorly lit path to success(145).

Discussion & Conclusion

Sociologists have long sought to explain why educational opportunities in American society—like opportunities more generally—are highly stratified along social class lines. Existing research, however, tends to focus on families and schools as the primary mechanisms of inequality, examining how these institutions create and perpetuate inequality. While these studies have offered countless significant insights into the process of social reproduction, they have also failed to fully explore whether or how children contribute to this process. Sociologists of stratification do occasionally recognize the importance of children's structural position in the cycle of social reproduction, but they also provide little empirical evidence of children's role in this process (Bourdieu 1973; Lareau 2000, 2002, 2003). Furthermore, while the sociology of childhood emphasizes children's active influence on the world around them (Corsaro 2005; Thorne 1993; Matthews 2007), it has not considered whether or how children's behavior and orientations might vary along class lines. Thus, while more research is needed to fully understand the nature of class differences in children's behavior and orientations, the findings

presented here clearly show that these differences exist, and that they have meaningful and potentially long-lasting consequences.

Through ongoing observations of students in a socioeconomically diverse, public elementary school, this study highlights marked social class differences in the interactional styles that kids display in the classroom. Even in the same school and classroom environments, middle-class kids are more willing than working-class kids to ask teachers for help and clarification, and also approach these interactions more confidently, more comfortably, and more strategically than do their working-class peers. Because teachers expect students to be proactive learners, seeking assistance when they need it (Patrick et al. 2001), middle-class kids' cultural styles give them an advantage in the classroom, making them better able to negotiate opportunities for learning and achievement.

These class differences in kids' ability to negotiate learning opportunities suggest that while the desire to succeed crosses class boundaries, the ability to do so is highly stratified. This stratification reflects the fact that the path to academic success is not well-lit, and only some kids—middle-class kids—have flashlights to see along the way. While working-class kids may have other tools in their toolkits (Swidler 1986), these tools may not be as aptly suited to meet the situations and expectations they encounter in school. As Bourdieu (1973, 1984) and Lareau (2000) suggest, the standards of the school are not neutral. Rather, there is a close alignment between middle-class culture and the standards set by schools and other dominant institutions. Schools expect students to follow these standards, but do not explicitly teach them how to do so, giving an advantage to those who come to school with the cultural tools and knowledge they need to meet these expectations.

This does not mean, however, that middle-class culture gives kids an automatic advantage in school settings. Rather, they have to "activate" their cultural tools—turning on their flashlights—to secure these advantages. As we saw with Christian, it was only after his mother became aware of his lack of help-seeking and encouraged him to be more confident in these interactions that Christian became

more willing and able to negotiate with teachers. That said, if middle-class kids do activate their cultural tools, they can use them to secure further advantages in the classroom. These kids can use their flashlights not only to guide them down the poorly lit path to success, but also to find and secure assistance and clarification from teachers, the "extra batteries" that can use to help them to continue—confident, supported, and guided—on their way.

While more research is needed to fully explore these possibilities, it seems likely that these social class differences in kids' classroom negotiations will only persist over time, into middle school, high school, and beyond. Similarly, while these early class differences have real consequences for children's learning opportunities, these consequences may also become more pronounced at higher levels of schooling. As Ryan and colleagues (1997) suggest, awareness of personal needs for assistance and proactive help-seeking "may take on greater importance in adolescence, in that teachers expect adolescent students to assume more responsibility for their learning both in and outside of school" (153). Furthermore, research also shows that today's middle- and high-school students are expected to make decisions about course-taking and college-going, decisions once made by school officials (Stevens 2007; Lucas 1999). These decisions, in turn, have far-reaching implications, affecting future course-placement, college eligibility and attendance, and possibly even employment opportunities (Stevenson, Schiller, & Schneider 1994; Schneider, Swanson, & Riegle-Crumb 1998; Eccles, Vida, & Barber 2004). Thus, if middle-class students are more willing and able to ask for help and clarification in choosing courses, colleges, and careers, they might also be more successful in navigating a path toward future success.[14]

Finally, and in light of its findings, this study also has implications for our understanding of the American educational system and its relationship to the structure of opportunity in society. Because kids seek individualized attention, help, and clarification from teachers, and particularly because these interactions are often successful, this suggests that education, even at the elementary level, is a far

more collaborative and contingent process than existing research would suggest. Thus, the existence of such negotiations has serious implications for our understanding of the nature and equality of education and opportunity in America. We as a society tend to presume that kids—especially within the same classrooms—will receive similar instruction and support, and will thus have similar chances to succeed. Dominant ideology also suggests that if some kids succeed while others fail, it is likely because of their innate ability and motivation to learn (Brantlinger 2003). And yet, if some students, by virtue of their class backgrounds, are better able than others to request individualized assistance and attention from teachers, this means that they will have very different experiences and opportunities than do those students—even in the same classroom—who are less willing or able to attempt such negotiations.

In conclusion, then, this study suggests that scholars need to consider an additional mechanism of social inequality in American society. The opportunity gaps that children face in school and beyond do not simply reflect between- or within-school differences in the opportunities that schools provide. Neither are they simply the product of class differences in parental involvement and intervention at school. Rather, kids actively influence their own opportunities in the classroom by adopting and displaying particular class-cultural tools, knowledge, and styles of interaction. In doing so, they both contribute to and perpetuate the persistent cycle of social reproduction.

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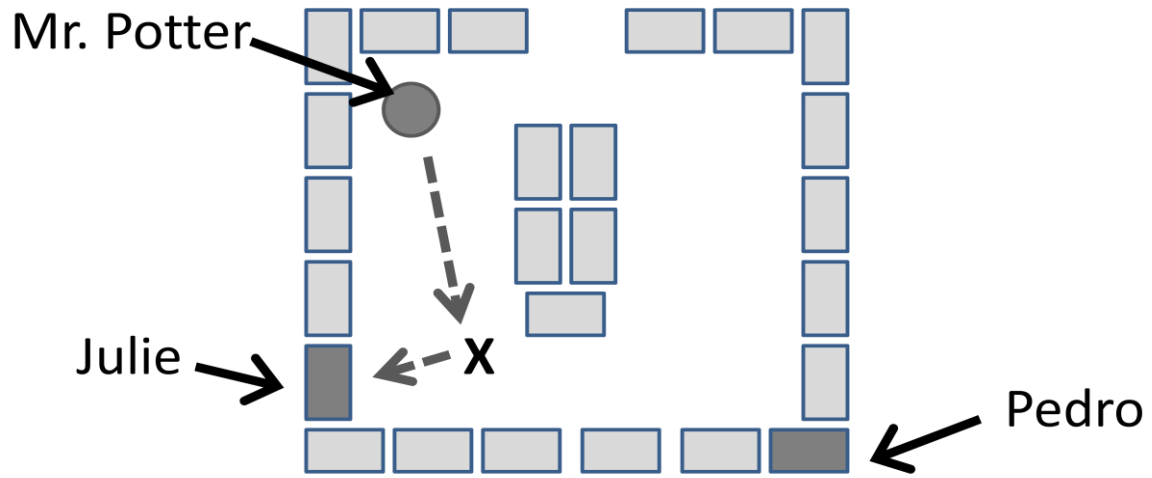
Figure 1:

Figure 1 illustrates the field note excerpt on page 33.

Appendix A:

School Characteristics: Maplewood Elementary School

School Structure	
School Type	Suburban, Public, Elementary School
Grades	K-5
Classes Per Grade	4
Class Size	20-25
Total Students	~500
School Composition	
Racial and Ethnic Composition	82%White; 9%Hispanic; 3%Black; 6%Asian
Gender Composition	52%Male; 48%Female
Achievement Composition[1]	Students Scoring "Proficient" or "Advanced" on State Assessments 3rd Grade: 92%Reading, 93%Math 4th Grade: 91%Reading, 93%Math 5th Grade: 88%Reading, 87%Math

[1] Data is from 2009, and is aggregated across all elementary students in the district. Disaggregated data for Maplewood is not yet available. http://www.nces.ed.gov

Appendix B:

Sample Characteristics

Study Sample: 56 Non-Hispanic, White Students in 5th Grade at Maplewood during the 2009-2010 School Year[1]		
Sample Characteristics	Working-Class Kids	Middle- and Upper-Middle-Class Kids
Number	12Kids	44Kids (23MC; 21UMC)
Gender	5Female 7Male	21Female 23Male
Race/Ethnicity	12White, Non-Hispanic	44White, Non-Hispanic
Parents' Education	Neither has a four-year college degree	**Middle Class**: at least one parent has four-year college degree **Upper-Middle Class**: both parents have four-year college degrees; at least one parent has advanced degree
Parents' Work	Blue-collar, retail, or service jobs Some mothers stay home	Professional jobs Many mothers stay home, often despite having advanced degrees
Home Environment	Mobile homes, apartment buildings, and smaller single family homes Most live in rented homes	Large single family homes, some worth over $1 million All lived in owned homes
Full Project Sample: 78 White, Hispanic, and Asian Students in 3rd, 4th, or 5th Grade at Maplewood from 2007-2010		
Sample Characteristics	Working-Class Kids	Middle- and Upper-Middle-Class Kids
Number	22Kids	56Kids
Gender	12Female 10Male	24Female 32Male
Race/Ethnicity	16White 6Hispanic/Latino	49White 7Asian-American

Resident Status	6Movers
	    (4White, 2Hispanic/Latino)
	16Original Participants
	0New Students
		6Movers
		    (5White, 1Asian-American)
		46Original Participants
		4New Students

Appendix C:
Teacher Characteristics

Grade/Subject	Teacher	Primary Tone with Students	Ideal Classroom Model
Third Grade	Ms. Campbell	Emphatic, Sarcastic, Demanding	Structured Achievement
	Ms. Filipelli	Warm, Praising, Encouraging	Flexible Routine
	Ms. Patterson	Emphatic, Anxious, Demanding	Rules and Responsibility
	Ms. Williams	Emphatic, Praising, Demanding	Organized Efficiency
Fourth Grade	Ms. Burns	Warm, Enthusiastic, Encouraging	Flexible Routine
	Mr. Cherlin	Emphatic, Praising, Encouraging	Organized Efficiency
	Ms. Nelson	Warm, Praising, Encouraging	Respect and Responsibility
	Ms. Phillips	Emphatic, Sarcastic, Demanding	Structured Achievement
Fifth Grade	Ms. Dunham	Warm, Energetic, Encouraging	Creativity and Curiosity
	Mr. Fischer	Emphatic, Sarcastic, Encouraging	Work Hard Play Hard
	Ms. Hudson	Emphatic, Praising, Demanding	Organized Efficiency
	Mr. Potter	Warm, Calm, Encouraging	Creativity and Curiosity
Art	Ms. Cantore	Warm, Anxious, Encouraging	Organized Efficiency
Spanish	Mr. Pratt	Warm, Energetic, Encouraging	Creativity and Curiosity
Gym	Ms. Winters	Emphatic, Sarcastic, Encouraging	Flexible Routine
Music	Mr. Vincent	Emphatic, Energetic, Demanding	Work Hard Play Hard
Library	Ms. Moretti	Warm, Calm, Encouraging	Flexible Routine

[1] Like most ethnographies, this study is limited in that it is a case study of a non-random sample of individuals in a particular setting. Although the findings are neither broadly generalizable nor directly representative of universal patterns of behavior, they can offer examples in support of theoretical claims (Burawoy et al. 1991).

[2] This reflects both residential segregation and the self-selection of middle-class families into private, charter, and magnet schools.

[3] Despite recognizing that "children actively contribute to societal preservation (or reproduction) as well as societal change" (Corsaro 2005), this research does not examine how children actively influence their opportunities, or how social class shapes children's behavior and interactional styles.

[4] Even these studies rarely offer direct comparisons of behavior across social classes within the same settings.

[5] This is particularly clear in Alexander Williams and Harold McAllister's doctor visits. While middle-class parents teach children that they have a right to voice preferences and concerns in institutional settings, working-class parents discourage children from asserting themselves in these settings, promoting both deference to and distrust of authorities.

[6] While they do not study the experiences of working-class kids in middle-class schools or middle-class kids in middle-class schools, Nelson and Schutz (2007) hypothesize that "children who receive divergent messages (e.g., a concerted cultivation approach at home and an accomplishment of natural growth approach at day care) [may] fare less well than those for whom the messages are more consistent" (313).

[7] While early psychological theories linked help-seeking with excessive dependence (Beller 1955; Sears, Maccoby & Levin 1957), recent evidence shows that help-seeking promotes effective, efficient learning.

[8] As a child, I attended other Fair Hills schools, and my mother taught for many years at a different elementary in the district. These experiences made me aware of the class diversity that exists at Maplewood and sparked my interest in studying social class differences in student behaviors and interactions within one school setting. My status as a former student and my ties to a district teacher facilitated my entry into the site. The district superintendent, the school principal, and many of the teachers and families already knew me, making them more comfortable allowing me to conduct such an intensive study in their school.

[9] Maplewood only ability-groups students for one hour of daily math instruction.

[10] Because tracking and ability-grouping—common high school practices—often segregate students by social class (Sirin 2005; Kahlenberg 2003), they limit examination of class-based variation in student behavior.

[11] I solicited parental consent for all children in the target cohort, which included all students in third grade at Maplewood in 2008-2009, but not those in full-time special-education programs (N=4). Twelve parents opted not to allow their children to participate, and another seven never returned the consent forms, even after repeated attempts at contact.

[12] The "middle-class" group includes both middle- and upper-middle-class students. I find no clear differences in the classroom behavior of these two groups, and thus, in the interest of brevity, identify both groups with a single term.

[13] Most research on "teacher expectations" focuses on teachers' assumptions about students' potential for academic achievement (Brophy 1983; Good 1987). In this paper, I use "teacher expectations" to mean teachers' beliefs (tacit or stated) about what student behaviors are both situationally appropriate and conducive to learning.

[14] This aligns with Lucas's (1999) finding that while most schools have eliminated formal tracking to alleviate social-class-based disparities in course taking, there are still significant social class differences in students' likelihood of taking college preparatory courses. Lucas, however, does not examine whether or how students seek help with course selection, and thus sees these disparities as the product of detracking itself, which he argues removed "signposts that lower-class students sorely need… to realize the implications of present choices [for] their future options" (145).